2.

A DISCOURSE CONCERNING Auricular Confession,

As it is prescribed by the

COUNCIL OF TRENT,

And practised in the

CHURCH of *ROME.*

With a Post-script on occasion of a Book lately printed in *France*, called

Historia Confessionis Auricularis.

LONDON,

Printed by *H. Hills* Jun. for *Benj. Tooke* at the Sign of the *Ship* in St. *Paul's* Church-yard; and *Fincham Gardiner* at the Sign of the *White-Horse* in *Ludgate-street*. 1684.

OF

Auricular Confeſſion.

THE Zealots of the Church of *Rome*, are wont to Glory of the ſingular advantages, in the Communion of that Church, eſpecially in reſpect of the greater means and helps of Spiritual comfort, which they pretend are to be had there, above and beyond what are to be found amongſt other Societies of Chriſtians. Which one thing, if it could be as ſubſtantially made out, as it is confidently aſſerted, could not fail to ſway very much with all Wiſe men, and would undoubtedly prevail with all devout perſons, (who were made acquainted with the ſecret) to go over to them. But if contrariwiſe it appear upon ſearch, that their pretenſions of this kind are falſe and groundleſs, and that the methods of Adminiſtring conſolation, which are peculiar to that Church, are as well unſafe and deceitful, as ſingular and unneceſſary: Then the ſame Prudence and Sincerity, will oblige a man to ſuſpect that Communion, inſtead of becoming a proſelyte to it, and to look upon the aforeſaid boaſtings as the effect either of deſigned impoſture, or at the leaſt of Ignorance and Deluſion.

Amongſt other things, that Church highly values it ſelf upon, the Sacrament of Penance (as they call it) and as deeply blames and condemns the Church of *England*, and other Reformed Churches, for their defect in, and neg-

lect of so important and comfortable an Office. And under that specious pretext, her Emissaries (who are wont according to the phrase of the Apostle, *to creep into houses, and lead Captive silly Women*, &c.) insinuate themselves into such of the People as have more Zeal then knowledge, and now and then wheadle some of them over into their Society. To that purpose, they will not only harangue them with fine stories of the ease and benefit of it, as of an Ancient and useful Rite, but will also Preach to them the necessity of it, as of Divine Institution, and that it is as important (in its kind) as Baptism or the Lords Supper. For that Confession to a Priest, and his Absolution thereupon obtained, is the only means appointed by God for the procuring of Pardon of all mortal sins committed after Baptism.

Concil. Trid. sess. 14. *c.* 2.

As for Original sin, or whatsoever actual transgressions may have been committed before Baptism, all those they acknowledg to be washed away in that sacred Laver. And for sins of Infirmity or Venial sins, these may be done away by several easy methods, by Contrition alone say some, nay, by Attrition alone (say others) by Habitual Grace says a third, *&c.* But for mortal sins committed after a man is admitted into the Church by Baptism, for these there is no other door of Mercy, but the Priests Lips, nor hath God appointed, or will admit of any other way of Reconciliation then this, of Confession to a Priest, and his Absolution.

Vid. Becan. *Tract. de Sacramentis in specie.*

This Sacrament of Penance therefore is called by them, *Secunda Tabula post naufragium*, the peculiar refuge of a lapsed Christian, the only Sanctuary of a guilty Conscience, the sole means of restoring such a person to Peace of Conscience, the Favour of God, and the hopes of Heaven. And withal, this method is held

held to be so Soveraign and Effectual a remedy, that it cures *toties, quoties*; and whatever a mans miscarriages have been, and how often soever repeated, if he do but as often resort to it, he shall return as pure and clean as when he first came from the Font.

This ready and easie way (say they) hath God allowed men, of quitting all scores with himself, in the use of which they may have perfect peace in their Consciences, and may think of the day of Judgment without horror, having their Case decided beforehand by Gods Deputy the Priest, and their Pardon ready to produce, and plead at the Tribunal of Christ.

What a mighty defect is it therefore in the Protestant Churches, who wanting this Sacrament, want the principal ministry of reconciliation? And who would not joyn himself to the Society of that Church, where this great Case is so abundantly provided for? For if all this be true, he must be extreamly fool-hardy and deserve to perish, who will not be of that Communion from whence the way to Heaven is so very easie and obvious, no wonder therefore I say, if not only the loose and vicious are fond of this Communion where they may sin and confess, and confess and sin again without any great danger, but it would be strange if the more Virtuous and Prudent also, did not out of more caution think it became them to comply with his expedient. For as much as there is no man who understands himself, but must be conscious of having committed sins since his Baptism, and then for fear some of them should prove to be of a mortal nature, it will be his safest course to betake himself to this refuge, and consequently he will easily be drawn to that Church, where the only remedy of his disease is to be had.

But the best of it is, these things are so oner said then

proved, and more easily phansied by silly People, then believed by those of discretion. And therefore there may be no culpable defect in the reformed Churches, that they trust not to this remedy in so great a Case. And as for the Church of *England* in particular, though she hath no fondness for Mountebank Medicines, as observing them to be seldom successful; yet she is not wanting in her care, and compassion to the Souls of those under her guidance, but expresseth as much tenderness of their peace and comfort, as the Church of *Rome* can pretend to. Indeed she hath not set up a Confessors Chair in every Parish, nor much less placed the Priest in the Seat of God Almighty, as thinking it safer, at least in ordinary Cases, to remit men to the Text of the written word of God, and to the publick Ministry thereof, for resolution of Conscience, then to the secret Oracle of a Priest in a corner, and advises them rather to observe what God himself declares of the nature and guilt of sin, the aggravations or abatements of it, and the terms and conditions of Pardon, then what a Priest pronounces. But however this course doth not please the Church of *Rome*, for reasons best known to themselves, which if we may guess at, the main seems to be this, they do not think it fit to let men be their own carvers, but lead them like Children by the hand; my meaning is, they keep People as much in Ignorance of the Holy Scripture as they can, locking that up from them in an unknown Tongue; now if they may not be trusted with those Sacred Records, so as to inform themselves of the terms of the New Covenant, the conditions of the Pardon of sin, and Salvation, it is then but reasonable that the Priest should Judge for them, and that they await their doom from his Mouth. Yet I do not see why in a Protestant Church, where

where the whole Religion is in the Mother Tongue, the Old and eſpecially the New Teſtament conſtantly, and conſcientiouſly expounded, and the People allowed to ſearch the Scriptures, and *to ſee whether things be ſo or no*, I ſee not, I ſay, Why in ſuch a caſe the Prieſt may not in great meaſure be excuſed the trouble of attending ſecret Confeſſions, without danger to the Souls of men.

But beſides this, there is a conſtant uſe of Confeſſion and Abſolution too, in the Church of *England*, in every Days Service; which though they be both in general terms, as they ought to be in publick Worſhip, yet every Penitent can both from his own Conſcience ſupply the generality of the Confeſſion by a remorſeful reflection upon his own particular ſins, as well as if he did it at the knees of a Prieſt; and alſo by an Act of Faith can apply the general Sentence of Abſolution to his own Soul, with as good and comfortable effects, as if it had been ſpecially pronounced by his Confeſſor.

But this publick Confeſſion doth not pleaſe the *Romaniſts* neither, and they know a Reaſon for their diſlike; namely, becauſe this doth not conciliate ſo great a Veneration to the Prieſt-hood, as when all men are brought to kneel to them for Salvation: Neither doth this way make them to pry into the ſecret thoughts of Men, as Auricular Confeſſion doth, wherein the Prieſt is not only made a Judge of mens eſtate, but a Spy upon their behavior, and is capable of becoming an Intelligencer to his Superiors of all the Deſigns, Intereſts, and even Conſtitutions of the People.

Moreover the Church of *England* allows of private Confeſſions alſo, as particularly in the Viſitation of the ſick, (which office extends alſo to them that are troubled in Mind or Conſcience, as well as to the afflicted in Body) where the Miniſter is directed to examine par-

particularly the state of the Decumbents Soul, to search and rummage his Conscience, to try his Faith, his Repentance, his Charity, nay, to move him to make a special Confession of his sins, and afterwards to absolve him upon just grounds.

Nay further yet, if besides the case of Sickness any Man shall bether out of perplexity of Mind, scrupulosity or remorse of Conscience, or any other devout consideration, think it needful to apply himself to a Priest of the Church of *England* for advice, ease, or relief, he hath incouragement and direction so to do in the first Exhortation to the Holy Communion, and may be sure to find those who will tenderly, and faithfully, as well as secretly administer to his necessities. So that I see not what defect or omission can be objected to this Church in all this Affair, or what Temptation any Man can have upon this account to go from us to the Church of *Rome*.

But all this will not satisfy them of the Church of *Rome*, they are neither contented with publick confession, nor with private, no nor with secret neither, if it be only occasional or voluntary: It is the universality and necessity of it which they insist upon, for it is not with them a Matter of Ecclesiastical Discipline, to prevent the Scandal of the Society, to conserve the Reverence of the Church, or to restrain men from sinning, or much less an Office of Expediency and Prudence to be resorted to upon exigencies, or such as may accidentally become necessary upon emergency as suppose upon the atrocity of some fact committed, the scandalousness of some persons former life, which may make him more doubtful of his Pardon, the weakness of his Judgment, the Melancholy of his Temper, or the Anxiety of his Mind, or any such like occasion, but it must be the standing indispensable duty of all men,

men, as the condition of the Pardon of their Sins; in one word it must be a Sacrament of Divine institution, and of Universal Obligation.

For so the Council of *Trent* determins, *Sess.* 4. *Canon* 1. *Si quis dixerit in Ecclesiâ Catholica pœnitentiam non esse verè & propriè Sacramentum pro fidelibus, quoties post Baptismum in peccata labentur, ipsi Deo reconciliandis a Domino nostro institutum, Anathema sit*; i.e. Let him be accursed, who shall affirm that Penance is not truly and properly a Sacrament instituted and appointed in the Universal Church, by our Lord Christ himself, for the reconciling those Christians to the Divine Majesty, who have fallen into Sin after their Baptism.

And in the Doctrinal part of that Decree they teach and assert more particularly; First, That our Saviour instituted this Sacrament expresly, *Joh.* 20. 22.

2. That this Sacrament consists of two parts, *viz.* the Matter and the Form; the Matter of the Sacrament (or *quasi materia* as they cautiously speak) is the acts or acts of the Penitent, namely, Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction; the Form of it is the act of the Priest in these words, *Absolvo te.* Sess. 14. Cap. 2.

3. That therefore it is the duty of every Man who hath fallen after Baptism, as aforesaid, to confess his sins at least once a year to a Priest. Cap. 3.

4. That this confession is to be secret; for publick Confession they say is neither commanded nor expedient. Cap. 5.

5. That this confession of Mortal sin be very exact and particular together with all circumstances, especially such as *speciem facti mutant*, alter the kind or degree of sin, and that it extend to the most secret sins, even of thought, or against the 9th. and 10th. Commandment. Ibid. Ibid.

6. That the Penitent thus doing, the Absolution of the Priest hereupon pronounced, is not conditional or declarative only, but absolute and judicial. Cap. 6.

Now

Now in oppoſition to this Doctrine and Decree of theirs, and the practice of that Church purſuant thereof, as well as in defence of the Doctrine and Practice of the Church of *England* in that particular, I will here endeavor to make good theſe Three things.

1. That our bleſſed Lord and Saviour hath neither in his Goſpel inſtituted ſuch an Auricular Confeſſion as aforeſaid, nor much leſs, ſuch a Sacrament of Penance as the Church of *Rome* ſuppoſes in the recited Decree.

2. That Auricular Confeſſion hath not been of conſtant and univerſal uſe in the Chriſtian Church, as the *Romaniſts* pretend, much leſs looked upon as of Sacramental and neceſſary Obligation.

3. That Auricular Confeſſion as it is now uſed in the Church of *Rome*, is not only unneceſſary and burdenſome, but in many reſpects very miſchievous to Piety, and the great ends of Chriſtian Religion.

If the firſt of theſe appear to be true, then (at the worſt) the want of ſuch an Auricular Confeſſion in the reformed Churches, can be but an irregularity, and no eſſential defect.

If the ſecond of theſe aſſertions be made good, then it can be no defect at all in thoſe Churches that uſe not ſuch a Rite, but a novelty and impoſition on their parts who ſo ſtrictly require it.

But if the third be true, it will be the corruption and great fault of the Church of *Rome* to perſevere in the injunction and practice of it, and the excellency and commendation of thoſe Churches which exclude it.

I begin with the firſt, that it doth not appear that our Saviour hath inſtituted ſuch an Auricular Confeſſion, of ſuch a Sacrament of Penance as the Church of *Rome* pretends and practiſes.

I confeſs it is a Negative which I here undertake to make

make good, which is accounted a difficult Province, but the Council of *Trent* hath relieved us in that particular by founding the Inſtitution expreſly upon that one paſſage of the Goſpel, *Joh.* 20. 22. So that we ſhall not need to examine the whole Body of Scripture to diſcover what footſteps of Divine Inſtitution may be found here or there, for the Council wholly inſiſts and relies upon that Text of St. *John*, and therefore if that fail them, the whole *Hypotheſis* falls to the ground.

Now for the clearing of this, let us lay the words before us; and they are theſe, *He breathed on them, and ſaid, Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt, whoſoever ſins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whoſoever ſins ye retain, they are retained.*

Now here I appeal to any Man that hath Eyes in his Head, or Ears to hear, whether in this Text there be any one word of Auricular Confeſſion, or much leſs of ſuch a circumſtantiated one as they require; And this is ſo manifeſt and notorious, that their own ancient Canoniſts and ſeveral of their learned Divines are aſhamed of the pretence of Divine Inſtitution founded upon this or any other paſſage of Scripture, and therefore are content to defend the practice of the Church of *Rome* in this particular, upon the account of the Authority, and general uſage of the Church; which we ſhall come to examine by and by in its due place.

In the mean time I cannot chooſe but admire the mighty Faith of a *Romaniſt*, who can believe in ſpight of his own Eyes. It ſeemed to us an unſuperable difficulty heretofore, for a Man to perſuade himſelf that in the Sacrament of the Euchariſt Bread was tranſubſtantiated into Fleſh, becauſe it was againſt the expreſs Teſtimony of Senſe, yea, although for that there was

the countenance of Five figurative (but miſtaken) words to ſupport the credulity; but this of the Sacrament of Penance clearly out-does it, for here a Man muſt believe a thing to be, when as there is not ſo much as one word for the ground of his Faith, or the proof of the thing in queſtion. How many Sacraments may not ſuch men have if they pleaſe? What voluminous Creeds may not they ſwallow and digeſt? What Mountains may not ſuch a wonderful Faith remove?

But let us hear what they have to ſay for themſelves; perhaps in the firſt place they will plead the Authority of the Council of *Trent*, which hath peremptorily determined the ſenſe of the paſſage of the Goſpel to the purpoſe aforeſaid. Indeed that Council in the third Canon of their fourteenth Seſſion, doth damn all thoſe who deny that a Sacrament of Penance and Auricular Confeſſion is preſcribed in that Text of St. *John*, or who apply it to any other purpoſe. But in ſo doing, they both uſurp a Prerogative which was never pretended to or practiſed by any Council before them, and withal they betray a conſciouſneſs that the Text it ſelf yielded no ſufficient evidence of the thing which they deſigned to countenance by it; for what Councils (ever till now) brought a Text, and then impoſed an Interpretation upon it contrary to the words? And then backt that Interpretation with an *Anathema*? If the Text were plain or could be made ſo, why was not that done? And to be ſure if that cannot be done by other means, the curſe will not do it; at leaſt to any but very obedient *Roman* Conſciences. Beſides if this courſe be allowed, I ſee not but a Council may bring in what Religion they pleaſe, having firſt made a Noſe of Wax of the Holy Scripture, and then writhed it into what ſhape they beſt phanſy; for in ſuch a caſe, if the words of the Goſpel do not favour me, I can go-

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vern the ſenſe, and if the letter be ſilent or intractable, I can help that with an Interpretation; and if I have authority or confidence enough to impoſe that, under the peril of *Anathema*, I am no longer an Interpreter or a Judg, but a Law-giver, and need not trouble my ſelf with *Scriptum eſt*, but may (if I will ſpeak plain) ſay *decretum eſt*, and the buſineſs is done.

But if neither the Letter of Scripture, nor the Authority of a Council will do in this caſe, then in the ſecond place they think they have at leaſt ſome colour of Reaſon to relieve them; and if they cannot find Auricular Confeſſion in the Text, yet they will by conſequence infer it thence; for they ſay although indeed it is true it is not here expreſly mentioned, yet it is certain that our Saviour in the Text before us inſtituted a Sacrament of Penance, and therefore Auricular Confeſſion muſt neceſſarily be implied becauſe abſolution cannot be without Confeſſion.

Here the Reader will obſerve that the point in Queſtion between us is very much altered, for we are now fallen from the conſideration of the Divine Inſtitution of Auricular Confeſſion in particular to that of a Sacrament of Penance in general, *i. e.* from a direct proof to a *ſubintelligitur*. But we will follow them hither alſo, and for the clearing of this matter we will briefly conſider theſe three things.

1. Whether that can properly be ſaid to be of Divine inſtitution, and neceſſary to Salvation, which depends on an inference, and is proved only by an *innuendo*?

2. Whether it can be reaſonable to aſſert that our Saviour there inſtitutes a Sacrament of Penance, where not only Auricular Confeſſion, but the whole matter of ſuch a Sacrament is left undefined?

3. Whether if our Saviour (had done that which it is plain he hath not, that is,) had here inſtituted and

appointed all thoſe things, which by the Church of *Rome* are required as the material parts of Penance, yet this could have been eſteemed a Sacrament?

1. For the firſt of theſe, we have no more to do but to conſider the force and ſignification of this word *Inſtitution*. Now that in the common uſe of men (eſpecially of thoſe which ſpeak diſtinctly and underſtandingly) implies a ſetting up *de novo*, or the appointing that to become a duty, which was not knowable, or at leaſt not known to be ſo before it became ſo appointed. For this word *Inſtitution* is that which we uſe to expreſs a poſitive command by, in oppoſition to that which is Moral in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, and of natural obligation. Now it is very evident that all things of this Nature ought to be appointed very plainly and expreſly, or elſe they can carry no obligation with them; for ſeeing the whole Reaſon of their becoming matter of Law or Duty, lies in the will of the Legiſlator, if that be not plainly diſcovered, they cannot be ſaid to be inſtituted, and ſo there can be no Obligation to obſerve them, becauſe *where there is no Law, there can be no Tranſgreſſion*; and a Law is no Law in effect which is not ſufficiently promulged. Is it not therefore a very ſtrange thing to tell us of an Inſtitution by implication only, and yet at the ſame time to tell us that the matter ſo (pretended to be) inſtituted, is no leſs then abſolutely neceſſary to the Salvation of Sinners?

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2. The ſecond of theſe will eaſily be reſolved by conſidering what we obſerved before from the Council of *Trent*, *viz.* that this Sacrament of Penance conſiſts of Matter and Form; the Form is the Prieſts Abſolution, but the Matter or Materials of this Sacrament are Contrition, Confeſſion to a Prieſt, and Satisfaction or Performance of the Penance enjoyn'd by him; now it is evident that not only Auricular Confeſſion (of which we have ſpoken

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ſpoken hitherto but alſo Contrition and Satisfaction, are wholly omitted and paſt over in ſilence by the Evangeliſt in this paſſage of Scripture, from whence they fetch their Sacrament of Penance; and is it not a wonderfully ſtrange thing, that our Saviour ſhould be ſuppoſed to inſtitute a Sacrament without any Materials of it at all? Surely therefore this muſt be either a very *Spiritual* Sacrament, or none at all.

Let us gueſs at the probability of this in proportion to either of the other undoubted Sacraments. Suppoſe our Saviour inſtead of that accurate form in which he inſtituted the Euchariſt had only ſaid, I would have you my Diſciples and all that ſhall believe on my Name to keep a Memorial of me when I am gone: Or ſuppoſe he ſaid only as he doth, *Joh. 6. 55. My Fleſh is Meat indeed, and my Blood is drink indeed*, would any one have concluded here, that our Saviour in ſo ſaying, had appointed Bread and Wine to be conſecrated, to be received in ſuch a manner, and in a word that he had (without more ado) inſtituted ſuch a Sacrament as we uſually celebrate? No certainly, and therefore we ſee our Saviour is the moſt expreſs and particular therein that can be, *for he takes Bread, bleſſes it, breaks it, gives it to them, ſaying, Take eat, this is my body*, &c. and *after Supper he takes the Cup, bleſſes it, gives it to them, ſaying, Drink ye all of this, for this is the New Teſtament in my Blood*, &c. and then adds, *do this in remembrance of me.* Now who is there that obſerves this accuracy of our Saviour in the Euchariſt, can imagine that he ſhould intend to inſtitute a Sacrament of Penance, and that as neceſſary to Salvation (in the Opinion of the *Romaniſts*) as the other, only with this Form of words, *Whoſoever ſins ye remit they are remitted*, &c. and without the leaſt mention of Confeſſion, Contrition, or any other Material or neceſſary Part or Circumſtance of it.

3. But

3. But in the third and laſt place, let us ſuppoſe that our Saviour had in the Text before us inſtituted Penance, and had appointed particularly all thoſe things, which they call the Material parts of it, (as it is evident he hath not) yet even then, and upon that Supposition, Penance would not have proved to be a Sacrament properly ſo called.

I confeſs according to a looſe acceptation of the word Sacrament, ſomething may be ſaid for it; for ſo there are many things have had the name of Sacrament applied to them. *Tertullian* ſomewhere calls *Eliſha*'s Ax the Sacrament of Wood, and in his Book againſt *Marcion* he ſtiles the whole Chriſtian Religion a Sacrament. St. *Auſtin* in ſeveral places calls Bread, Fiſh, the Rock, and the Myſtery of Number, Sacraments, for he hath given us a general Rule in his Fifth Epiſtle, *viz.* That all ſigns when they belong to divine things are called Sacraments: And in conſideration hereof it is acknowledged by *Caſſander*, that the Number of Sacraments was indefinite in the Church of *Rome* it ſelf, until the times of *Peter Lombard*. But all this notwithſtanding, and properly ſpeaking, this Rite of Penance taking it altogether (and even ſuppoſing whatſoever the *Romaniſts* can ſuppoſe to belong to it) cannot be reputed a Sacrament, according to the allowed definitions of a Sacrament delivered by their own Divines. Some of them define a Sacrament thus, *a Sacramentum eſt corporale elementum foris ſenſibiliter propoſitum, ex ſimilitudine repræſentans & ex inſtitutione ſignificans, & ex Sanctificatione continens inviſibilem gratiam.* And the *b* Maſter of the Sentences himſelf deſcribes it ſomewhat more briefly, but to the ſame effect in theſe words: *Sacramentum eſt inviſibilis gratiæ viſibilis forma, ejuſdem gratiæ imaginem gerens & cauſa exiſtens*; both which definitions are acknowledged and applauded by the Jeſuite *c Becanus*: And

a Hugo *de* S. Vict. *lib. de Sacram.*

b Magiſt. Sent. *lib. 4. diſt. 1.*

c Becanus *Tract. 2. de Sacramentis.*

And the plain truth is a Sacrament cannot be better expreſt in ſo few words, then it is by St. **Auſtin* when he calls it *verbum viſibile* a viſible Word or Goſpel: For it pleaſed the Divine Wiſdom and Goodneſs by this inſtitution of Sacraments to condeſcend to our weakneſs, and thereby to give us ſenſible Tokens or Pledges of what he had promiſed in his Written word, to the intent that our dulneſs might be relieved, and our Faith aſſiſted; foraſmuch as herein, our Eyes and other Senſes as well as our Ears are made Witneſſes of his gracious intentions. Thus by Baptiſmal waſhing he gives us a ſenſible token and repreſentation of our regeneration, and the waſhing away of our ſins by the Blood of Chriſt; and by the participation of Bread and Wine in the Lords Supper we have a Token and Symbol of our Union with Chriſt, our Friendſhip with God and Communion with each other.

*Aug. *c.* Fauſt. *Lib.* 19. *C.* 16.

But now it is manifeſt there is no ſuch thing as this in their Sacrament of Penance (as even *Bellarmine* himſelf confeſſes.) For they do not ſay or mean that the Abſolution of the Prieſt is a Token or Emblem of God's forgiveneſs, but that the Prieſt actually pardons in God's ſtead, by Virtue of a Power delegated to him. So that according to them, here muſt be a Sacrament, not only without any material parts inſtituted, but alſo without any thing Figurative, Symbolical or Significative, which ſeems to be as expreſly contrary to their own Doctrine in the aforeſaid definitions as to the truth it ſelf.

Nay, further to evince the difference of this Rite of Penance from all other proper Sacraments; it deſerves obſervation, that whereas in thoſe other acknowledged Sacraments, the Prieſt in God's Name delivers to us the Pledges and Symbols of Divine Grace. Here in this of Penance we muſt bring all the material Parts and Pledges our ſelves, and preſent them to God, or

to

to the Prieſt in his ſtead: My meaning is, that whereas (for inſtance) in Baptiſm the Prieſt applies to us the Symbol of Water, and in the Euchariſt delivers to us the conſecrated Elements in token of the Divine Grace, contrary-wiſe here in Penance we muſt on our parts bring with us Contrition, Confeſſion, and Satisfaction too, in which reſpect we may be rather ſaid to give Pledges to God, then he to us; which is widely different from the Nature of other Sacraments, and ſeems no leſs to be contrary to the Reaſon and Notion of a Sacrament in general.

The Sum of what we have hitherto diſcourſed, amounts to this; Firſt, That here is no Auricular Confeſſion inſtituted by our Saviour, *Joh.* 20. 22. as was pretended. Secondly, Nor, any Sacrament of Penance in which it can be included or implied; no nor indeed any Sacrament at all.

I confeſs I might have ſpared all the words I have uſed in proving the latter, for ſo long as I have made appear that private Confeſſion is not inſtituted, it was not ſo very material to conſider whether Penance could be a Sacrament or no; but this I added to ſhew the imperious dictates of that Church, and their extravagancy in impoſing the moſt Sacred Names upon their own inventions, thereby to give them the greater veneration with the People.

And thus I would diſmiſs the firſt part of my undertaking, but yet the *Romaniſts* will not forego their pretenſions for Auricular Confeſſion; for they will yet urge, that whether or no we will call it a Sacrament which our Saviour inſtitutes in the Text before us, it is however certain here is a Power conferred on the Apoſtles, and their Succeſſors, of remitting and retaining ſins; for by theſe words, *Whoſoever ſins ye remit they are remitted*, &c. * Our Saviour hath made the Prieſt

* *Chriſtus conſtituit Sacerdotes ſui ipſius Vicarios.* Seſſ. 14. *Præſides & Judices* lib. c. 4.

Prieſt a judge of Mens conſciences and conditions; wherefore that he may not proceed blindly and indiſcriminately it is neceſſary that he know the merits of the Cauſe, and not only underſtand the matter of fact, but all the circumſtances which may aggravate or extenuate it, all which cannot be attained without the Confeſſion of the party, therefore Auricular Confeſſion is as neceſſarily implied in the Text, as Abſolution or Retention of ſins is expreſt in it. So they.

Sacerdos ſolvit peccata poteſtate quadam prætoria Bellar. lib. 1. de ſacram. c. 10. Chriſtus ratam habet ſententiam à Sacerdote latam. id. lib. 3. c. 2.

But I crave leave to demand in the firſt place, Is it certain that upon ſuch a Confeſſion as they require, the Prieſt (as ſuch) will be able to make a right judgment of a Mans caſe that addreſſes himſelf to him, eſpecially conſidering the intricacy of ſome Caſes, and the ignorance of ſome Prieſts; upon this account are thoſe memorable words of St. *Auſtin Confeſſ. lib.* 10. *c.* 3. *Quid mihi ergo eſt cum hominibus ut audiant Confeſſiones meas, quaſi ipſi ſanaturi ſint omnes languores meos, & unde ſciunt cum à meipſo de meipſo audiunt, an verum dicam? Quando quidem nemo ſcit hominum quid agitur in homine, niſi ſpiritus hominis qui in ipſo eſt. i. e.* 'To what purpoſe ſhould I Con-'feſs my ſins to Men who cannot heal my wounds? 'For how ſhall they (who know nothing of my heart 'but by my own Confeſſion) know whether I ſay 'true or no? For no one knows what is in Man, but 'the Spirit of Man that is in him. O yes, they will ſay *clave non errante*, that is to ſay, if he judge right, he judges right, and no more, and this is mighty comfort to a diſtreſſed conſcience.

Secondly, Though we grant our Saviour hath given the Prieſt Authority to Remit and Retain ſins, yet how doth it appear that this extends to Secret ſins; ſins in thought only, or as the Council expreſſes it

againſt the ninth and tenth Commandments? Of open ſins and publick ſcandals the Church hath cognizance, and hath a right which ſhe may inſiſt upon, or recede from, if ſhe ſee cauſe, becauſe ſuch ſins are an injury to the Society as well as an offence againſt God, and therefore here the Officers of the Church may diſpenſe her Authority, and Remit or Retain (as we ſhall ſee more by and by;) but in ſecret ſins where only God is injured, and to which he is only privy, what hath the Church to do, unleſs they be voluntarily diſcovered to her? Otherwiſe they are properly reſerved Caſes to the Tribunal of God.

Thirdly, I would be bold to enquire further, why may not ſins, eſpecially ſuch as we laſt named, be Remitted upon Confeſſion to God, without Confeſſion to the Prieſt alſo? And I the rather ask this for theſe two reaſons, Firſt I obſerve that this very Council of *Trent* ſaith, that until the times of our Saviour, and his Inſtitution of this Sacrament, ſins were remitted upon contrition only, and application to the mercies of God, without Auricular Confeſſion. They cannot therefore now ſay, remiſſion implies this Confeſſion, for that cannot be ſaid to be implied in the nature of a thing, when the thing it ſelf can be had without it.

Seſſ. 14. *c.* 1.

They will anſwer that it is ſufficient, that it is now made neceſſary by our Saviour. But I reply, Then that Inſtitution which now makes it neceſſary, muſt be better proved then yet it hath been, or elſe Men will be very apt to hope they may now under the Goſpel obtain Pardon (at leaſt) upon as eaſie terms as it was to be had at before.

My Second reaſon of asking that Third Queſtion is this; I obſerve that their own Schoolmen acknowledg ſins to be remitted under the Goſpel by the Prieſt

Aquinas ſumm. part. 3. *Q.* 68.

Prieſt without any Confeſſion to Men, particularly in the Adminiſtration of Baptiſm, by which it plainly appears, that Confeſſion is not implied in the nature of Remiſſion, but one may be had without the other, and then why may not a ſinner after Baptiſm, hope for Pardon upon his contrite and devout application to the Word and Sacraments, without this new device and pick-lock of Conſcience, Auricular Confeſſion.

But ſo much for that.

Sect. 3. I proceed now to the ſecond thing propounded, namely, to inquire hiſtorically whether or no Auricular, or ſuch a ſecret, and Sacramental Confeſſion, as aforeſaid, hath been of conſtant and univerſal uſe in the Chriſtian Church, as the *Romaniſts* pretend, and as the Council of *Trent* aſſerts, *Seſſ.* 14. Chap. 5.

This inquiry is not into matter of Law or Divine Right, as the former was, but of Fact only, yet never the leſs it is of great moment upon a double account:

1. Becauſe this is the ground which the Old *Roman* Canoniſts wholly went upon, (as I noted before;) they exploded all pretence of Divine Inſtitution in the caſe, as having more modeſty (it ſeems) then to pretend ſo high upon no better evidence, or at leaſt they contented themſelves to preſcribe for it only upon the Authority of conſtant and univerſal practice; now if we ſhew the falſeneſs of this ground, as well as of the other, then will their Hypotheſis of Auricular Confeſſion have no foot to ſtand upon.

2. Becauſe the Credit of what hath been already ſaid under the former head, doth very much depend upon this, and that Diſcourſe will be confirmed or impaired reſpectively to what ſhall be evidently made out in this ſecond point. Forasmuch as if on the one

ſide it be made apparent that ſuch a Rite hath been of conſtant uſe in the Chriſtian Church, it will afford a great preſumption that it took its riſe at firſt from Divine Inſtitution, notwithſtanding all we have offered to the contrary. So on the other ſide, if the Evidence here anſwer not the Pretenſion, and no ſufficient footſteps of conſtant and univerſal practice appear: Then will all that which we have hitherto diſcourſed, be greatly ſtrengthened and confirmed; becauſe it is by no means probable, that if there had been a Divine Law in the caſe, that ſuch a thing would have been generally neglected by the Chriſtian Church.

Now for the clearing of this, though I am here only upon the defenſive, and ſo bound to no more then to examine the proofs which the *Romaniſts* bring for their pretenſions, yet I will deal ingenuouſly, as ſeeking not to find Flaws, but to diſcover the Truth, and therefore give theſe inſtances as ſo many reaſons for the Negative.

In the firſt place I crave leave to premiſe this: If Auricular Confeſſion were ſo great a Goſpel myſtery, ſo wonderfully efficacious a method of ſaving Souls, as to be typified in the Law (as the *Romaniſts* teach) as well as inſtituted in the Goſpel and practiſed by the whole Church, one might ſeem juſtly to wonder how it comes to paſs that there ſhould be no mention, nor appearance of it in the whole courſe of our Saviours own Miniſtry; he uſed to be an example, as well as a Law-giver to the Church, he waſhed his Diſciples Feet, before he enjoined them to waſh one another; he exemplified the other Sacraments before he preſcribed his Apoſtles to adminiſter them, & one would have thought ſuch an Inſtance of his example had been more neceſſary in this buſineſs of Penance, rather than any other, if it had

had been but to make way for the Underſtanding of ſo obſcure an Inſtitution; ſince eſpecially, one would have thought to find ſome Traces of this in the Miniſtry of our Saviour, becauſe he daily converſed with ſinners, he reproved them, inſtructed them, healed them, pardoned them, but never brought any of them to ſuch a Confeſſion as we are treating of; *viz.* To a particular enumeration of their ſins with the circumſtances, nor upon ſo doing formally abſolved them. His very Diſciples (ſome of which had been great ſinners) were admitted without it; the Woman of *Samaria* was told by him all that ever ſhe did, but ſhe was not brought on her knees to make her own Confeſſion; but moſt ſtrange of all it is, that the Woman taken in Adultery, when he had made her accuſers ſlink away, was not privately brought to it; it may be they will ſay, there was no need of Confeſsion to him who knew all before, but yet it might have been neceſſary to bring theſe Sinners to be aſhamed of themſelves by that means to work Repentance, and fit them for Pardon, at leaſt if this Method had been of ſuch mighty uſe and wonderful neceſſity as is pretended.

2. But to let paſs that; in the next place it is matter of wonder that nothing of this practice appears in the Miniſtry of the Apoſtles; they went about preaching the Goſpel, calling Men to Repentance, erecting and governing Churches, but never ſet themſelves down in a Confeſſors Chair for penitents, ſecretly to tell them in their Ear, the Story of their vicious Lives; indeed we read, *Acts* 19. 18. That ſome came *in and ſhewed their deeds*; but firſt it was voluntary, and in a fit of Holy Zeal, for we cannot find that they were required to do it, as of Sacramental Obligation; & beſides, the Confeſſion was publick before the Church, not clancular, and whiſpered in ſecret; it is true alſo

ſo that St. *James*, *chap.* 5. 16. adviſes the Chriſtians to confeſs their faults one to another, (which is made a mighty evidence in this Caſe;) but it is as true, that this was ſpoken in an extraordinary Caſe, as appears *v.* 14. in bodily ſickneſs and diſtreſs of Conſcience, they are adviſed to lay open their condition, in order to relief and ſuccour, by the more ardent and affectionate Prayers of thoſe who ſhould be made privy to it, but it is not made a ſtanding and univerſal rule for all Men to comply with, whether they be ſick or well, in proſperity or adverſity, perplexed or quiet in their Conſciences, much leſs of Sacramental and Neceſſary Obligation, as in the *Roman* Church.

3. Let us go on in the next ages after the Apoſtles, for about two hundred years we find not one word of this kind of Confeſſion, which we enquire for. Indeed the writings of that time which are extant, are not many, but if this buſineſs had been of ſuch conſequence as is pretended, it is ſtrange that thoſe Holy Men *Ignatius*, *Clemens* and *Juſtin* Martyr, ſhould not have any mention of it.

Indeed *Bellarmine* brings us one inſtance within this Period, and that is from *Irenæus*, who ſpeaking of Certain Women who had been abuſed by *Marcion* the Heretick, ſaith they afterwards came and Confeſſed all, with ſhame and ſorrow, to the Church. But what is this to the purpoſe? We diſpute not againſt publick Confeſſion, which is acknowledged to be truly Primitive, and we wiſh it had been conſtantly maintained in after ages, it is only the neceſſity of Clancular Confeſſion that we are unſatisfied in, and this paſſage ſpeaks nothing at all to that Caſe.

4. In

4. In *Tertullians* time, which was alſo much about Two hundred Years after our Saviour, we find great things ſaid of Confeſſion, but it is of that which was publick, and in the face of the Church, not to a Prieſt in a Corner, and this indeed was greatly incouraged and required by the Holy Men of thoſe times, as that which in the Caſe of open and ſcandalous ſins, freed the Church both from the guilt, and from the reproach of them, and in the Caſe of ſecret ſins, was a means (by open ſhame) to bring Men to Repentance, and ſo to Pardon. And the Confeſſion was principally directed to God, who was the perſon offended by the ſin, yet it was made before Men to raiſe a fervency in their Prayers, as is noted before, and to obtain their effectual interceſſion with God on behalf of the penitent. This that Ancient writer makes manifeſt to be his Senſe in his Book *de Pœnitentia* in theſe words *Plerumque vero jejuniis preces alerè, ingemiſcere, lachrymari, & mugire dies noctéſque ad Dominum Deum tuum, Presbyteris advolvi, & aris* (or rather *charis*) *dei adgeniculari, omnibus fratribus legationes ſuæ deprecationis injungere, hæc omnia ex homologeſis ut pœnitentiam commendet*, &c. the penitent often joyns Faſting to his prayers, weeps, wails and moans night and day before God, caſts himſelf at the feet of the Prieſts, kneels to all holy people, and intreats all the Brethren to be his Interceſſors with God Almighty for his Pardon: This is penitential Confeſſion, &c. And in his Apology more plainly; *Coimus in Cœtum*, &c. *ibidem exhortationes, caſtigationes & cenſura divina nam & judicatur magno cum pondere ut apud certos de Dei conſpectu, ſummumq; futuri judicii præjudicium eſt ſi quis ita deliquerit ut à communione*, &c. *religetur*; we have (ſaith he) in our Eccleſiaſtical Aſſemblies, a Spiritual Judicature, and with great gravity

Tertull. Apol. c. 39.

vity censure offenders, &c. But I need say no more of this; for we have the Testimony of *Beatus Rhenanus*, one of the *Roman* Church and of great insight into Ecclesiastical Affairs, who gives us this account of *Tertullian* and his times, *nihil illum de clancularia illa pœnitentiâ loqui, quæ id temporis penitus ignorabatur*; there was no such thing as secret or Clancular Confession in use in *Tertullian*'s time, which was a thing not so much as known by the Christian Church in those days.

Beatus Rhenan. in præf. ad Tertull. *de pœnitent.*

5. To go a little lower, such was the manner of proceedings in St. *Cyprian*'s time, as he himself describes it, the sinner by outward gestures and tokens shew'd himself to be sorrowful and penitent for his sin, and then made humble Confession thereof before the whole Congregation, and desired all the Brethren to pray for him; which done, the Bishop and Clergy laid their hands upon him, and so reconciled him: So it was also in *Origen*'s time, and once for all, to deliver the Custom of the Church in those times, touching this particular, I will add the words of the Historian, *Rei ad terram se pronos abjiciunt*, &c. they that are Conscious to themselves to have offended, fall down flat upon the ground with Weeping and Lamentations in the Church, on the other side the Bishop runs to them with tears in his Eyes, and falls down to the ground, also in token of Sorrow and Compassion, and the whole Congregation in the mean while Sympathizing with both, is overwhelmed with tears, &c.

St. Syprian. *Lib.* 3. *Eph.* 15.

Origen *in* Ps. 37.

Sozomen *L.* 7. *Cap.* 16.

6. If we go lower yet to the times of St. *Chrysostom* and St. *Austin*, we find those Holy Men speaking very slightly of Confessions to Men, so little did they think of Auricular Confession being a Sacrament. St. *Austin*'s Judgment in the case we have heard before, in the Tenth Book of his Confessions, and third Chapter; and for the other, the Testimonies out of him are so many

St. Chrysost. *ad Hebr. Homil.* 31. *Id. in Serm. de Confess. & Pœnit.* &c.

many, and ſo well known, that I cannot think it neceſſary to tranſcribe them; and as for St. *Jerom* who lived about the ſame time, I think it ſufficient to repeat the account of *Eraſmus*, who was very converſant in his Writings, and indeed of all the other Fathers, and who had no other fault I know, but that he did uſe *Mordaci radere vero*, to be too great a Tell-truth; which ſure will not invalidate his Teſtimony; his words are theſe, *Apparet tempore Hieronimi nondum inſtitutam fuiſſe ſecretam admiſſorum Confeſſionem.—— Verùm in hoc labuntur Theologi quidam parum attenti, quòd quæ veteres ſcribunt de publica & generali confeſſione, ea trahunt ad occultam & longe diverſi generis, i.e.* It is evident (ſaith he) that in St. *Jerom*'s time (which was about Four hundred years after our Saviour) there was no ſuch thing as Secret Confeſſion in uſe; but the miſtake is that ſome few later and inconſiderate Divines have taken the inſtances of general and publick Confeſſion then practiſed, for arguments of that Auricular Confeſſion which is now uſed, though quite of a different nature from it.

Thus we have traced the Current of Antiquity for Four or Five hundred years to ſearch for the Head of this *Nilus*, the ſource and riſe of that kind of Confeſſion which is ſo highly magnified by the Church of *Rome*, but hitherto we have found nothing of it, and this methinks ſhould be ſufficient to ſtagger an impartial inquirer, at leaſt it is as much as can be expected in ſo ſhort a Treatiſe as this is intended to be) and may ſatisfy the unprejudicate, that there is as little of Antiquity to favour this Rite, as there is of Divine Inſtitution to be pleaded for it. But yet I know on the other ſide, that the *Romaniſts* pretend to bring abundance of Teſtimonies for it, and *Bellarmine* particularly goes from Century to Century with his Citations to pre-

ſcribe for the conſtant and uninterrupted uſe of it, but I do ſincerely think that theſe Four following ſhort Obſervations will inable a Man to anſwer them all.

1. I obſerve that whereas this word *Exomologeſis* is commonly uſed by diverſe of the Fathers, as the Phraſe whereby they intend to expreſs the whole nature of Repentance in all the parts and branches of it, as is evident by the paſſage I cited out of *Tertullian de Pœnit.* even now, and is acknowledged by *Bellarmine* himſelf; nevertheleſs, merely becauſe that word ſignifies Confeſſion properly, and nothing elſe, theſe *Romiſh* Sophiſters, where they find this word *Exomologeſis*, force it into an Argument for that Confeſſion, which they contend for; and ſo ſeveral Diſcourſes of the Fathers, concerning Repentance in general, are made to be nothing but *Exhortations* to, or *Encomiums* of Confeſſion in particular, and that muſt be nothing elſe neither but Auricular Confeſsion, the thing in Queſtion. A caſt of his skill in this way, *Bellarmine* gives us in *Irenæus*, the very firſt Author he cites for Auricular Confeſsion in the laſt quoted Book and Chapter of his Writings *De Sacramentis.*

2. Whereas the Novatians excluded all hopes of Repentance or Pardon for ſins committed after Baptiſm, but the true Church contrariwiſe admitted to hopes of Pardon upon their Repentance; upon this occaſion, when ſome of the Fathers juſtly magnify the advantages, and comfortableneſs of the true Church above the Schiſmatical, as that it ſet open a Door of Hope to thoſe who confeſſed their ſins, and applied themſelves to her Miniſtry: Hence theſe witty men will perſuade the World, that every true Church had a Confeſſors Chair, and ſuch a formal way of pardoning as they now practiſe at *Rome*; as if there was no remiſsion,

miſsion of Sin, where there was no Auricular Confeſsion, and as if all that excluded the latter, rejected the former too, and were no better than Novatian Hereticks; whenas in Truth the Power of the Keys is exerciſed in all the Miniſtries of the Church, and ſhe Pardons and retains Sins, otherwiſe than by the Oracle of a particular Confeſſor, as we have ſeen already. This piece of jugling the ſame *Bellarmine* is alſo guilty of in his Citation of *Lactantius*. Bellarm. *de Pœnit. Lib.* 3. C. 8.

3. Whereas the Ancient Writers are much in the Commendation of Confeſsion of Sins, whether it be to God or to the Church, but generally intending that which is Publick, it is common with thoſe of the Church of *Rome*, to lay hold of all ſuch ſayings as were intended to perſuade to, and incourage publick Confeſſions, and to apply them to Auricular or Clancular Confeſſions, thus particularly the aforeſaid Author does by *Tertullian* in his Citation of him. *Id. Lib.* 3. C. 6.

4. And Laſtly, Whereas it is alſo true that ſeveral of thoſe Holy Men of Old, do in ſome caſes very much recommend Confeſſion of ſecret ſins, and perſuade ſome ſorts of Men to the uſe of it, namely thoſe that are in great perplexity of Conſcience, and that needed Ghoſtly Counſel and Advice, or to the intent that they might obtain the aſſiſtance of the Churches Prayers, and make them the more ardent and effectual on their behalf, whereas I ſay, they recommended this as an expreſſion of Zeal, or a prudent expedient, or at moſt as neceſſary only in ſome caſes *pro hîc & nunc*. Theſe great Patrons of Auricular Confeſſion do with their uſual artifice apply all theſe paſſages, to prove it to be a ſtanding and univerſally neceſſary duty, a Law to all Chriſtians; this is a very common fault amongſt them, and particularly St. *Cyprian* is thus miſapplied by the ſame forementioned Writer,

Lib. 3. *Cap.* 7.

Hitherto inquiring into the moſt Ancient and Pureſt times of the Church, by the Writings of the Fathers of thoſe times, we have not been able to diſcover any ſufficient ground for ſuch an Auricular Confeſsion, as the Church of *Rome* pretends to, much leſs for a conſtant and uninterrupted ſucceſsion of it. But now after all I muſt acknowledge there is a paſſage in Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory which ſeems to promiſe us ſatisfaction herein, and therefore muſt by no means be ſlightly paſſed over without due conſideration; it is the famous ſtory of *Nectarius* Biſhop of *Conſtantinople*, and Predeceſſor to St. *Chryſoſtom*, which happen'd ſomething leſs then Four hundred years after our Saviour.

Socrat. *Hiſt. Lib.* 5. *Cap.* 19. Sozomen. *Lib.* 7. C. 16.

The Story as it is related by the joint Teſtimony of *Socrates* and *Sozomen* runs thus: In the time of this *Nectarius* there was (it ſeems) a Cuſtom in that Church (as alſo in moſt others) that one of the Presbyters of greateſt Piety, Wiſdom, and Gravity ſhould be choſen Penitentiary, that is, be appointed to the peculiar Office of receiving Confeſſions, and to aſſiſt, and direct the Penitents in the management of their Repentance: Now it happens that a certain Woman of Quality, ſtricken with remorſe of Conſcience, comes to the Penitentiary (that then was) and according to Cuſtom, makes a particular Confeſſion of all ſuch ſins, as ſhe was conſcious to her ſelf to have committed ſince her Baptiſm, for which he, according to his Office appointed her the Penance of Faſting, and continual Prayers to expiate her Guilt, and give proof of the Truth of her Repentance. But ſhe proceeding on very particularly in her Confeſſions, at laſt amongſt other things comes to declare that a certain Deacon of that Church had lien with her; upon notice of which horrid Fact, the Deacon is forthwith caſhier'd and caſt out of the Church: By which means the miſ-

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carriage takes Air, and coming to the knowledge of the People, they preſently fall into a mighty commotion and rage about it, partly in deteſtation of ſo foul an Action of the Deacon, but principally in contemplation of the Diſhonour, and Scandal thereby reflected on the whole Church. The Biſhop finding the Honour of the whole Body of his Clergy extreamly concern'd in this accident, and being very anxious what to do in this caſe, at laſt by the Counſel of one *Eudæmon* a Presbyter of that Church, he reſolves thenceforth to aboliſh the Office of Penitentiary, both to extinguiſh the preſent flame, and to prevent the like occaſion for the future; and now by this means every Man is left to the Conduct of his own Conſcience, and permitted to partake of the Holy Myſteries at his own peril. This is the matter of fact faithfully rendered from the words of the Hiſtorian; but this if we take it in the groſs, and look no further then ſo, will not do much towards the deciding of the preſent Controverſy, we will therefore examine things a little more narrowly by the help of ſuch hints as thoſe Writers afford us, perhaps we may make good uſe of it at laſt; and to this purpoſe,

1. I obſerve in the firſt place, that though at the firſt bluſh here ſeems to be an early and great example of that Auricular Confeſſion which we oppoſe, foraſmuch as here is not only the Order of the Church of *Conſtantinople*, for Confeſſion to a Prieſt, but that to be of all ſins committed after Baptiſm, and this to be made to him in ſecret; notwithſtanding upon a more thorough view it will appear quite another thing from that pleaded for, and practiſed by the Church of *Rome*, and that eſpecially in the reſpects following: Firſt, In the Auricular Confeſſion in the Story, there is ſome remainder of the ancient Diſcipline of the Church

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(whose Confessions used to be open and publick, as I have shewed) in that here a publick Officer is appointed by the Church to receive them, such an one as whose Prudence, and Learning, and Piety she could confide in for a business of so great nicety and difficulty, and it is neither left to the Penitent to choose his Confident for his Confessor, nor at large for every Priest to represent the Authority of the Church in so tickliſh an Affair as that of Discipline, but to a publick Officer appointed by the Church for this purpose; so that Confession to him cannot be said to be private, seeing it is done to the whole Church by him. To confirm which, *Secondly*, This Penitentiary it seems was bound (as there was occasion) to discover the matters (opened to him in secret) to the Church, as appears in the Crime of the Deacon in the Story; there was no pretence of a Seal of Confession in this Case, as in the Church of *Rome*, by Virtue of which a Man may confess and go on to sin again secretly, without danger of being brought upon the Stage, whatsoever the atrocity of his Crime be, and indeed without any effectual course in Order to his Repentance and Reformation. Again, *Thirdly*, This Confession in the Story doth not pretend to be of absolute necessity as if a Mans sins might not be pardoned without it; but only a prudent Provision of the Church to help Men forward in their Repentance, to direct the Acts and Expressions of it, and especially to relieve perplexed and weak Consciences, and to assist them in their preparations for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and this appears, amongst other things, by the account which the Historian gives us of the consequence of abolishing it, *viz.* That now every Man is left to his own Conscience about his partaking of the holy Mysteries; but it is not said or intimated that he was left under the guilt of his

his Sins, for want of Confeſſion. To which add in the laſt place, that this Office whatever it was, was not reputed a Sacrament, but rather, as I noted before, an expedient to prepare men for it, for doubtleſs neither that Biſhop, nor that Church would have ever conſented to the abolition of a Sacrament, for the ſake of ſuch a Scandal as happen'd in the miſmanagement of it, or if they had done ſo, much leſs can it be imagined that the greateſt part of the Chriſtian Church would have concurred with them in it, as we ſhall by and by ſee they did.

2. I obſerve concerning the beginning of this Penitentiary Office, the time and occaſion of this uſage; namely, that the Hiſtorians do not pretend it to have been Apoſtolical, much leſs of ſtrictly Divine Inſtitution, but they lay the Heat of its firſt riſe about the time of the *Decian* Perſecution, which was about Two hundred years after our Saviour. I confeſs *Nicephorus* would perſuade us of its greater Antiquity, and that it was rather revived then inſtituted at that time, for he ſpeaking of the bringing it into uſe at the *Decian* Perſecution ſaith, ἐκκλησιαστικῷ κανόνι ἑπόμενοι, *i. e.* the Church purſuant of the Ancient Eccleſiaſtical Canons conſtituted a Penitentiary, *&c.* And *Petavius* is ſo addicted to the *Roman* Hypotheſis, as very unreaſonably to favour this Conceit; but the Truth ſeems to be (as *Valeſius* very ingenuouſly acknowledges) only this, that here was a miſtake of the import of the words of the Hiſtorian, who ſaith only that when the Church had choſen their Penitentiary κανόνι προσέθεσαν, they added him to the Canon, that is to the number of thoſe in the *Matricula* or Roll of ſuch as were to be maintain'd in and by the Church, or as we would ſay they made him Canon of the Church; not that he was Conſtituted in ſuch an Office, purſuant of an Ancienter

Nicephor. *Lib.* 12. *Cap.* 28.

cienter Law or Canon, as *Nicephorus* carelesly or willfully mistakes. Besides afterwards when the Historian observes that the Novatians universally withstood this Order from the beginning of it, he calls it προσθήκην ταύτην; *q. d.* this new Institution, or Addition, or Supplement of the Ancient Rites of the Church; so that there is no reason we should date this Institution higher then the Historian doth, namely, after the *Decian* Persecution.

But what should be the ground and reasons of erecting this new Office, and Officer in the Church then, if it was not before? Of this I give two accounts.

First, The Church being now very numerous, and the Zeal and Devotion very great; and what by the compassionate reception which the Church gave to Penitents, and her ardent Prayers for them, what by the earnest harangues of Holy Men to move People to repentance, abundance were inclined to confess their sins, and this Confession being till that time accustomed to be open, and publick in the face of the Congregation, it must needs happen (all those circumstances considered together) that a great many things would be brought upon the Stage, the Publication of which would be attended with great inconveniences; for some sins are of that Nature, that they scarce can take Air without spreading a Contagion, some Confessions would make sport for light and vain Persons, and besides abundance of other inconveniences (easy to be imagined by any one) the publication of some sins might expose the Penitents to the Severity of the Pagan Criminal Judge; upon these and such like considerations, the Church thought fit therefore I (as have intimated before) to appoint one wise and very grave Person in her stead to

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receive the Confeſsions; who by his diſcretion might ſo diſcriminate matters, that what things were fit for ſilence, might have private Methods applied to them, but what were fit to be brought upon the Stage, might be made Publick examples of, or receive a Publick remedy.

Secondly, But the Hiſtorian leads us to a more ſpecial Reaſon of this Inſtitution at that time; namely, that the rage of the *Decian* Perſecution cruelly ſhook the Church, and abundance of her weaker members fell off in the Storm, and, which was worſt of all, the Church was diſtracted about the reſtitution or final rejection of thoſe that had ſo miſcarried; for though the beſt and wiſeſt of the Church were ſo merciful and conſiderate of humane infirmity, as to be willing to receive thoſe in again, upon Repentance, over whom the Temptation of fear had too much prevailed, yet the Novatians a great and Zealous part of Chriſtianity, looked upon ſuch as deſperate, who had once broken their baptiſmal Vow, and would rather ſeparate from the Church themſelves, than ſuffer ſuch to be reſtored to it. Here the Church was in a great ſtrait, either ſhe muſt be very ſevere to ſome, or ſhe ſhall ſeem very unkind to others, ſhe muſt either let the weak periſh, or ſhe muſt offend them that counted themſelves ſtrong. Now in this caſe ſhe being both tenderly compaſſionate towards thoſe that had fallen, and withal willing to ſatisfie thoſe Novatian Diſſenters, or at leaſt to deliver her ſelf from Scandal, takes this courſe, ſhe requires that thoſe who had fallen, and deſired to be reſtored again to her Society, ſhould acknowledge their faults, and make all the Penitent ſatisfaction that was poſſible for them to perform, that ſo neither they may be too eaſily tempted to do ſo again by the gentleneſs of the remedy, nor the

Novatians reproach her Lenity, or take pet, as if no difference was made between the sound and the lapsed; for these causes, though the most publick Penance was thought little enough to be undergone by the lapsed; but yet on the other side, considering wisely the inconveniences of publick Penance in some cases (as I specified before) she therefore took this middle course; namely, she appointed a publick Confessor, who having first heard privately the several cases of the Penitents, should bring into publick, only such of them as (without incurring any of the aforesaid dangers) might be made exemplary. And this appears to be the true reason of this Institution, and the bottom of this affair, by this remarkable passage in the Historian; That whereas the generality of the Orthodox closed presently with this wise temperament, the Novatians only, those self conceited Non-conformists, rejected προσθήκην ταύτην, this expedient as a new invention; they were too humoursome to comply with such a temperament.

But here another Question arises, *viz.* How far this new expedient was imbraced by the Orthodox Churches, for if it was only received by that of *Constantinople*, the Authority would not be so great; for it is possible to imagine, that other Churches might allow every private Priest to confess, and so admit of no publick Penitentiary.

To which I answer, that by the History it seems plain enough, that this was not the peculiar manner of the Church of *Constantinople* only, but the usual Method in that time of most other Churches also; but I must needs say, I do not find that the Church of *Rome* complied with them herein, though it was not much to her Honour to be singular, where there was so much Prudence and Piety to have inclined her to Uniformity.

formity. However this is gained, which is my point, that the Church of *Rome* is not countenanced in her practice of private and clancular Confessions, by the general usage of the Church, as they pretend.

3. I observe concerning this Office of Penitentiary, that as it was erected upon prudential considerations, so it was upon the same grounds abolished, by the same Authority of the Church which first instituted it, and that after about Two hundred years continuance in the time of *Nectarius*, as we have seen; & therein he was followed, saith *Sozomen* by almost all the Bishops and Churches in the World; this therefore was far from being thought either a Divine or Apostolical Constitution: *Petavius* would here persuade us, that it was only publick Confession, and not private, which was upon this occasion so generally laid aside, as we have seen, but this is done by him more out of tenderness of Auricular Confession, than upon good reason; and *Valesius* goes beyond him, and will needs persuade us, that neither publick nor private Confession were put down in this juncture, but only that the lately erected Officer of Penitentiary was cashier'd; but I must crave leave to say, there is no sufficient reason for either of these conjectures, but on the contrary plain Evidence against them, for *Socrates*, who is the first and principal relater of this whole story saith he was personally acquainted with this Presbyter *Eudemon*, who gave the advice to *Nectarius* to make this change in the Discipline of the Church, and that he had the aforesaid relation of it from his own Mouth, and expostulated with him about it, giving his reasons to the contrary, and suggested his suspicions that the state of Piety would be much endamaged by this change, and in plain words tells him, that he had now bereft men of assistance in the conduct of their Consciences, and

hindred the great benefit men have, or might have one of another by private advice and correption. Now this fear of his had been the abſurdeſt thing in the World, if upon this counſel and advice of his, only one certain Man in the Office of publick Confeſſioner had been laid aſide, but both the uſe of publick and private Confeſſions had been kept up and retained.

But after all (for ought appears) the Church of *Rome* kept her old Mumpſimus, ſhe tenacious of her own cuſtoms eſpecially of ſuch as may advance her Intereſt and Authority, complies not with this Innovation or Reformation (be it for better or worſe) but her Prieſts go on with their Confeſſions, and turn all Religion almoſt into Clancular Tranſactions, in deſpight of the example of other Churches. It may be ſhe met with oppoſition ſometimes, but ſhe was forced to diſemble it till the Heroick Age of the Schoolmen, and then thoſe luſty Champions with their Fuſtian-ſtuff of *videtur quod fic*, & *probatur quod non*, make good all her pretenſions. After them in the year 1215 comes the Fourth *Lateran* Council, and that decrees Auricular Confeſſion to be made by every body once a year at the leaſt; and laſt of all comes the Council of *Trent*, and declares it to be of Divine Inſtitution, neceſſary to Salvation, and the conſtant and univerſal cuſtom of the Chriſtian Church: And ſo we have the Pedigree of the *Romiſh* Auricular Confeſſion.

Sect. 4. I come now to the third and laſt Stage of my undertaking, which is, to ſhew that Secret or Auricular Confeſſion, as it is now preſcribed and practiſed in and by the Church of *Rome*, is not only unneceſſary, and burdenſom in it ſelf, but alſo very miſchievous to Piety, and the great ends of Chriſtian Religion.

For the former part of this charge, if it be not evident enough already, it will eaſily be made out from the

the Premiſes, for they cannot deny that they make this kind of Confeſſion neceſſary to Salvation, at leaſt as neceſſary as Baptiſm it ſelf is, (ſuppoſing a Man hath ſinned after Baptiſm) now if it be neither made ſo by Divine Inſtitution, nor acknowledged to be ſo by the conſtant Opinion of the Church, what an horrible impoſition is here upon the Conſciences of Men, when in the higheſt and worſt ſenſe that can be they teach *for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, and make Salvation harder than God hath made it, and ſuſpend mens hopes upon other terms then he hath done? If it was preſcribed by the preſent Church as a matter of Order and Diſcipline only, or of convenience and expediency, we ſhould never boggle at it upon this account, or diſpute the point with them; or if it was only declared neceſſary *pro hîc & nunc*, upon extraordinary emergency, by the peculiar condition of the Penitent, his weakneſs of judgment, the perplexity of his Conſcience, his horrible guilt or extream Agonies, we would not differ with them upon that neither; but when it is made neceſſary univerſally, and declared the indiſpenſable duty of all men whatſoever who have ſinned after Baptiſm (when God hath required no ſuch thing, but declares himſelf ſatisfied with true contrition and hearty remorſe for what is paſt, and ſincere Reformation for the time to come; this I ſay is an intolerable Tyranny and uſurpation upon the Conſciences of Men. And that is not all neither, for beſides its burdenſomneſs in the general, it particularly aggravates and increaſes a Mans other burdens, for inſtead of relieving perplexed Conſciences, which is the true and principal uſe of Confeſſions to Men, this prieſtly Confeſſion as it is preſcribed by the Council, intangles and afflicts them more; for that injoyns that the Penitent lay open all his ſins, even the moſt ſecret, although

but

but in thought or desire only, such as against the Ninth or Tenth Commandment, (according to their Division of the Decalogue,) now this is many times difficult enough; but that's not all, he must also recount all the circumstances of these sins, which may increase or diminish the guilt, especially such as *alter the species and kind* of sin: Now what sad work is here for a Melancholy Man? All the circumstances are innumerable, and how can he tell which are they that change the Species of the act, unless he be as great a Schoolman as his Confessor. Besides all this, it may be he is not very skilful in the distinction between venial and mortal sins, and if he omit one mortal sin, he's undone; therefore it is necessary for him (by consequence) to confess all venial sins too, and then where shall the poor Man begin, or when shall he make an end? Such a *Carnificina* such a rack and torture, in a word, such an Holy Inquisition is this business of Auricular Confession become. And that Eminent Divine of *Strasburgh* (of whom *Beatus Rhenanus* speaks) seems very well to have understood both himself, and this matter who pronounces that *Scotus* and *Thomas* had with their tricks, and subtilties, so perplexed this plain Business of Confession, that now it was become plainly impossible. And so much for that.

But as for the second part of this impeachment, *viz.* That the Auricular Confession now used in the Church of *Rome*, is mischievous to Piety; This remains yet to be demonstrated, and we will do it the rather in this place, because it will be an abundant Confirmation of all that which hath been discoursed under the two former Heads; and might indeed have saved the labour of them, but that we were unwilling to leave any pretence of theirs undiscussed; for if this practice of theirs appear to be mischievous to Piety, it will never

never by any ſober man be thought either to have been inſtituted by our Saviour, or to have been the ſenſe and uſage of the Catholick Church, whatever they pretend on its behalf.

Now therefore this laſt and important part of my charge I make good by theſe Three Articles following.

First, This Method of theirs is dangerous to Piety, as it is very apt to cheat People into an Opinion that they are in a better Condition then truly they are, or may be in towards God, as that their ſins are pardoned, and diſcharged by him, when there is no ſuch matter. The Church-men of *Rome* complain of the Doctrine of ſome reformed Divines touching aſſurance of Salvation, that it fills men with too great confidence, and renders them careleſs and preſumptuous; but whatſoever there is in that, it is not my buſineſs now to diſpute it, however methinks it will not very well become a *Romaniſt* to aggravate it, till he have acquitted himſelf in the point before us; for by this Aſſurance Office of theirs they comply too much with the ſelf flattery of Mens own Hearts, they render Men ſecure, before they are ſafe, and furniſh them with a confidence like that of the Whore *Solomon* ſpeaks of, *who wipes her Mouth, and ſaith I have done no evil.* For Men return from the Confeſſors Chair (as they are made to believe) as Pure as from the Font, and as Innocent as from their Mothers Womb; as if God was concluded by the act of the Prieſt, and as if he being ſatisfied with an humble poſture, a dejected look, and a lamentable murmur, God Almighty would be put off ſo too.

Ah nimium faciles qui triſtia crimina, &c.

Ah cheating Prieſts who made fond Men believe,
That God Almighty pardons all you ſhrieve. Per-

Perhaps they will ſay this is the fault and folly of the Men, not of the Inſtitution of the Church: But why do they not teach them better then? Nay, why do they countenance and incourage them in ſo dangerous miſtakes? For whither elſe tend thoſe words in the Decree of the Council of *Trent*, *ipſi Deo reconciliandis? q. d.* that by this way of Confeſſion, &c. men are reconciled to the Divine Majeſty himſelf; or thoſe other forecited, where the Prieſt is ſaid to be the *Vicar of Chriſt, and in his ſtead*, a Judge or Preſident; or eſpecially what other meaning can thoſe words have where it is ſaid, that *this Rite is as neceſſary as Baptiſm, for as in that all ſins are remitted which were committed in former time, ſo in this all ſins committed after Baptiſm are likewiſe remitted*?

Seſſ. 14. *Can.* 1.

Ibid. Cap. 5.

Ibid. Cap. 2.

Now I ſay, what is the natural tendency of all this, but to make People believe that their Salvation or Damnation is in the Power of the Prieſt, that he is a little God Almighty, and his diſcharge would certainly paſs current in the Court of Heaven. But there is ſophiſtry and juggle in all this, as I thus make appear; for,

1. The Prieſt cannot pardon whom he will, let him be called *Judex* and *Præſes* never ſo; for if his Sentence be not according to Law it will be declared Null at the Great Day; only it may be good and valid in the mean time *in foro Eccleſiæ*; and here lies the cheat.

2. Nor are all ſins retained or unforgiven with God, that are not pardoned by the Prieſt; it is true in publick Scandals, till the Sinner ſubmit to the Church, God will not forgive him; *For what that binds on Earth is in this ſenſe bound in Heaven*; but what hath the Church to do to retain, or to bind the Sinner in the caſe of ſecret ſins, where it can charge no guilt on him?

3. Nor

3. Nor is it properly the act of the Prieſt which pardons, but the Tenor of the Law, and the diſpoſition of Mind in the Penitent agreeable thereunto, qualifying him for Pardon, to which the Pardon is to be imputed: As it is not the Herald which pardons, but the Prince who by his Proclamation beſtows that Grace upon thoſe who are ſo and ſo qualified.

4. Nor, Laſtly, Can the Prieſt be ſaid to pardon ſo properly by thoſe Majeſtick words, *abſolvo te*, as by his whole Miniſtry, in inſtructing People in the Terms of the New Covenant, and making Application of that to them by the Sacraments; this he hath Commiſſion to do, but thoſe big words I cannot find that he hath any where Authority to pronounce, and therefore (as I think I obſerved before) the Ancient Church had no form of Abſolution, but only receiving Penitents to the Communion: And the *Greek* Church had ſo much modeſty as to Abſolve in the third Perſon, not in the firſt, to ſhew that their Pardon was Miniſterial and Declarative only.

All theſe things notwithſtanding the People are let to go away with ſuch an Opinion as aforeſaid (becauſe it is for the Grandeur and Intereſt of the Prieſthood, that they ſhould be cheated; but theſe miſapprehenſions would vaniſh, if their teachers would be ſo juſt as to diſtinguiſh between God's Abſolution, and the Abſolution of the Church; the firſt of which extends to the moſt ſecret ſins, the latter to open Scandals only; the one delivers from all real guilt, the other from external Cenſure only; of the latter the Prieſt may (by the leave of the Church) have the full diſpenſation, ſo that he is really pardoned with her that hath ſatisfied the Prieſt; but of the former he diſpenſes but conditionally. To confirm all which I will here add only two Teſtimonies of the judgment of the Ancient Church.

The first is of *Firmilianus* Bishop of *Cæsarea* in his Epistle to St. *Cyprian*, reckoned the Seventy Fifth of St. *Cyprians*, where speaking of holding Ecclesiastical Councils every Year, he gives these reasons for it; *Ut si qua graviora sunt communi consilio dirigantur, lapsis quoque fratribus, & post lavacrum salutare à Diabolo vulneratis, per pœnitentiam medela quæratur; non quasi à nobis remissionem peccatorum consequantur, sed ut per nos ad intelligentiam delictorum suorum convertantur, & Domino plenius satisfacere cogantur*; partly (saith he) that by joint advice, and common consent, we may agree upon an uniform Order in such weighty Affairs as concern our respective Churches, partly that we may give relief, and apply a remedy to those who by the temptation of the Devil have fallen into sin after Baptism; *not that we can give them Pardon of their sin, but that by our Ministry they may be brought to a knowledge of their sins, and directed into a right course to obtain Pardon at the Hands of God.* The other is of *Theodorus* Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury* whose words are these: *Confessio quæ soli Deo fit purgat peccata: Ea vero quæ Sacerdoti fit, docet qualiter purgentur. Confession to God properly obtains the Pardon of Sin; but by Confession to Men, we are only put into the right way to obtain pardon.* Thus they:

Theod. *Cantuar. apud* Beat. Rhen. *in præf. ad* Tertul. *de pœnit.*

But now in the Church of *Rome*, the case is otherwise; there the Priest sustains the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and is not so much his Delegate as his Plenipotentiary, and his Pardon is as full and good as if the Judge of the World had pronounced it *pro Tribunali*; so that if the most lewd and habitual Sinner have but the good fortune to go out of the World under the Blessing of his Ghostly Father; that is to say, either death came so soon after his last Absolution, or the Priest came so opportunely after his last sin, that he hath

hath not begun a new ſcore, he is ſure to go Heaven without more ado. This I repreſent as the firſt miſchief attending their Doctrine, and Practice of Auricular Confeſſion. But this is not all, for

Secondly, It corrupts and debauches the very Doctrine and Nature of Repentance which the whole Goſpel lays ſo much ſtreſs upon: Making Attrition (which is but a ſlight ſorrow for ſin, or a diſlike of it in Contemplation of the Wrath of God impendent over it) paſs for Contrition, which implies an hatred and deteſtation of it for its own moral evil and deformity, with a firm reſolution of amendment. This they many of them are not aſhamed to teach, and their practice of Abſolution ſuppoſes and requires it. The Jeſuites in particular, who have almoſt ingroſt to themſelves the whole Monopoly of Confeſſions, avow this as their Principle. Father *Bauny*, *Eſcobar*, and *Suarez* declare their Judgment, that the Prieſt ought to abſolve a Man upon his ſaying, that he deteſts his ſin, although at the ſame time the Confeſſor doth not believe that he does ſo. And *Cauſſin* ſaith, if this be not true, there can be no uſe of Confeſſions amongſt the greateſt part of Men. Theſe things (it's true) are diſliked by ſome others of the *Romaniſts*, and the *Curees* of *France* are ſo honeſt as to cry ſhame of it before all the World; for, ſay they, Attrition is but the work of Nature, and if that alone will ſerve for Pardon, then a Man may be pardoned without Grace. But therefore, ſay the others, the Sacrament of Penance doth it alone, and this is for the Honour of the Sacrament; greatly for the Honour of it (ſay I) that it is of greater power then our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and his Goſpel, which cannot help a wicked Man to Heaven, whileſt he continues ſo, but this Sacrament it ſeems can. Nor can they excuſe this matter by ſay-

ing theſe odious aſſertions are but the private Opinions of ſome Divines. For they are plainly favoured by the determinations of the Council of *Trent*; I confeſs that Council delivers it ſelf warily and cunningly in this point (as it uſes to do in ſuch caſes) yet theſe are their words, *Illa vero contritio imperfecta quæ attritio dicitur, quamvis ſine Sacramento Pœnitentiæ per ſe ad juſtificationem perducere peccatorem nequeat, tamen eum ad Dei Gratiam in Sacramento Pœnitentiæ impetrandam diſponit*, &c. Which is as much as to ſay, though Attrition or a ſuperficial Sorrow for Sin, barely, alone, and without Confeſſion to a Prieſt, will not juſtify a Man before God, yet Attrition and Confeſſion together will do it, for then they are as good as true Repentance. And in this ſenſe *Melchior Canus* long ſince thought he underſtood the Council well enough.

Conc. Trident. *Seſſ.* 14. *Cap* 4.

Thirdly, This buſineſs of Auricular Confeſſion, as it is practiſed in the Church of *Rome*, is ſo far from being a means to prevent and reſtrain ſin, as it highly pretends to be (and I am ſure as it ought to be, if it be good for any thing) that contrariwiſe it is either loſt labour, and a meer Ceremony, or it greatly incourages and imboldens, and hardens Men in it, both by the Secrecy, the Multitudes, and the Frequency of theſe Confeſſions, by the curſory, hypocritical and evaſive ways of confeſſing, by the ſlight Penances impoſed, and the cheapneſs, eaſineſs, and even proſtitution of Abſolutions.

It were eaſy to be copious in inſtances of all theſe kinds, but it is an uncomfortable ſubject, and I haſten to a concluſion; therefore I will only touch upon them briefly.

1. For the privacy of theſe Confeſſions. In the Ancient Church (as I have noted before) the Scandalous Sinner was brought upon the Stage before a great Aſſembly

ſſembly of Grave and Holy Men, he lay proſtrate on the ground, which he watered with his Tears, he crept on his Knees, and implored the Pitty and Prayers of all preſent, in whoſe countenances (if for ſhame he could look up) he ſaw abhorrence of his fact, indignation at God's diſhonour, conjoined with compaſſion to his Soul, and joy for his Repentance; his Confeſſion was full of remorſe and confuſion; the remedy was as ſharp and diſguſtful to Fleſh and Blood as the Diſeaſe had been pleaſant, and the pain of this expiation was able to imbitter the ſweet of Sin to him ever after. Or if the Confeſſion was not made before the whole Church, but to the Penitentiary only, yet he was a Grave and Holy Perſon, choſen by the Church, and repreſenting it, a Perſon reſident in that Church, and ſo able to take notice of, and mind the future Converſation of thoſe that addreſſed themſelves to him; a Perſon of that Sanctity and Reverence that he could not chooſe but deteſt and abhor all baſe and vile actions that ſhould come to his knowledge: Now it muſt needs be a terrible cut to a Sinner to have all his lewdneſs laid open before ſuch an one, and then to be juſtly, and ſharply rebuked by him, to have his ſins aggravated, and to be made to ſee his own ugly ſhape in a true glaſs held by him, beſides to be enjoined the performance of a ſtrict Penance of Faſting and Prayer, and after all (if this do not do) to have the Church made acquainted with the whole matter (as in the caſe of the Deacon aforeſaid.) This courſe was likely to work ſomething of remorſe in the Sinner for what was paſt, and to make him watchful and careful for the time to come.

But what is the way of the Church of *Rome* like to this? Where a Man may confeſs to any Prieſt, to him that knows him not, and ſo cannot obſerve his future life

life and carriage; nay, perhaps that knows not how to value the guilt of sin, or to judge which be Venial, and which Mortal Sins, or especially what circumstances do alter the species of it, and it may be too, he may be such an one that makes no Conscience himself of the sins I confess to him. Now, when all is transacted between me and such a Priest in a corner, and that under the inviolable Seal of Confession, what great shame can this put me to? What remorse is it likely to work in me? What shall discourage me from going on to *sin again, if no worse thing happen to me?*

2. And then for the multitude of Confessions in the Church of *Rome*, that also takes off the shame, and weakens the efficacy of it, so that if it do no harm, it is not likely to do any good; for who is concern'd much in the doing that which he sees all the World do as well as himself; if only notorious Sinners were brought to Confession (as it was in the Primitive Church) then it might probably and reasonably provoke a blush, and cause a remorse in him to whom such a remedy was prescribed; but when he sees the whole Parish, and the Priest too brought to it, and Men as generally complying with it, as they approach to the Lord's Table; What great wonders can this work? What shame can it inflict upon any Man! What effect can be expected from it, but that it ordinarily makes Men secure and careless, and grow as familiar with sin as with the remedy, or at least think as well of themselves as of other Men, since it seems they have as much need of Confession and absolution as himself?

3. To which the frequency and often repetitions of these kind of Confessions adds very much; it is very likely

likely that modeſty may work much upon a Man the firſt or ſecond time he goes to Confeſſion, and it may ſomething diſcompoſe his Countenance when he lays open all his ſecret miſcarriages, to a Perſon eſpecially for whom he hath a Reverence (for we ſee every thing, even ſin it ſelf is modeſt in its beginnings;) and no doubt it is ſome reſtraint of ſin whilſt a Man is ſenſible that he muſt undergo a great deal of pain and ſhame in vomiting up again his ſweet Morſels which he eats in ſecret: But by that time he hath been uſed to this a while, it grows eaſie and habitual to him, and cuſtom hath made the very puniſhment pleaſant as well as the ſin; eſpecially, if we add,

4. The formal, curſory, hypocritical, and illuſive ways of Confeſſion in frequent uſe amongſt them; as that a Man may chooſe his own Prieſt, and then to be ſure the greateſt Sinner will have a Confeſſour right for his turn, that ſhall not be too ſevere and ſcrupulous with him; that a Man may confeſs *in tranſitu*, in a hurry or huddle, and then there can be no remark made upon his Perſon nor his ſins; that a Man may make one part of his Confeſſion to one Prieſt, and reſerve the other part for another, ſo that neither of them ſhall be able to make any thing of it; that he may have one Confeſſour for his Mortal ſins, and another for his Venial; ſo that one ſhall ſave him, if the other damn him; nay, for failing, the forgetful ſinner may have another Man to confeſs for him, or at leaſt he may confeſs, that he hath not confeſſed; theſe and abundance more ſuch illuſive Methods are in daily uſe amongſt them, and not only taken up by the licentious and unconſcionable People, but allowed by ſome or other of their great Caſuiſts; now let any Man judge whether this be a likelier way to reſtrain ſin,

or

or to encourage it; whether the easiness of the remedy (if this be one) must not of necessity make the Disease seem not very formidable; in a word, whether this be not a ridiculing their own Religion, and, which is worse, a teaching Men to be so fool hardy *as to make a mock of sin.*

5. This sad reckoning will be inflamed yet higher if we consider the slight Penances usually imposed by these Spiritual Judges upon the greatest Crimes. The Council determines that the Confessour must be exactly made acquainted with all the circumstances of the sin, that so he may be able to adjust a Penance to it; now when some great sin is confessed and that in very foul circumstances, if the Penance proportioned to it, by the Priest be to say two or three *Pater Nosters*, or *Ave-Maria's* extraordinary, to give a little Money in Alms to the Poor or some Pious use, to kneel on his bare knees before such a Shrine, to kiss such an Image, to go on Pilgrimage a few Miles to such a Saint, or at most to wear an Hair Shirt, or it may be to fast with Fish, and Wine, and Sweetmeats, *&c.* doth not this make that sin which is thus mawled and stigmatized, look very dreadfully, can any Man find in his Heart to sin again, when it hath cost him so dear already?

Oh, but they will tell us these Penances are not intended to correspond with the guilt of the sin, but only to satisfy the debt of Temporal punishment. But we had thought that the end of Penance had been, to work in the Penitent a disposition for Pardon, by giving him both opportunities and direction to express the sincerity of his Repentance; and this was the use of Penance in the Primitive Church, together with the taking off the Scandal from the Society; and for that other end how doth the Church of *Rome* know

ſo certainly that there is a debt of Temporal puniſhment remaining due, after the ſin is pardoned before God; it is true, God may pardon ſo far only as he pleaſes, he may reſolve to puniſh temporally thoſe whom he hath forgiven eternally, as we ſee he did in the caſe of *David*; but that this is not his conſtant Method appears by this that our Saviour releaſes the Temporal puniſhment to many in the Goſpel, whoſe diſeaſes he cured, ſaying to them, *Your ſins are forgiven you*, when as yet it did not appear that all Scores were quitted with God ſo, but that they might have periſhed eternally, if they did not prevent it by Faith and Repentance.

6. But laſtly, to come to an end of this ſad ſtory, the eaſineſs and proſtitution of their abſolutions in the Church of *Rome* contributes, as much to the encouraging of Vice and careleſneſs in Religion as any of the former; for what elſe can be the natural effect and conſequence of that ruled caſe among their Caſuiſts (as I ſhew'd before) that the Prieſt is bound to abſolve him that confeſſes, and ſaith, he is ſorry for his ſin, though he doth in his Heart believe that he is not contrite, but that either the Prieſts Pardon is a very cheat, or elſe that Pardon is due of courſe to the moſt impenitent Sinner, and there is no more to do but *Confeſs and be Saved*? or what is the meaning of their common practice to abſolve men upon their Death-beds, whether they be contrite, or attrite, or neither, at leaſt when they can give no Evidence of either? If they intended this only for abſolution from the Cenſures of the Church it might be called Charity, and look ſomething like the practice of the Primitive Church, which releaſed thoſe upon their Death-beds, whom it would not diſcharge all their lives before, tho not then neither without ſigns of Attrition and con-

trition too; but theſe pretend to quite another thing; namely to releaſe men *in foro Conſcientiæ*, and to give them a Paſs-port to Heaven without Repentance, which is a very ſtrange thing, to ſay no worſe of it. Or to inſtance one thing more, what is the meaning of their practice of giving Abſolution before the Penance is performed (as is uſual with them) unleſs this be it, that whether the Man make any Conſcience at all how he lives hereafter, yet he is pardoned as much as the Prieſt can do it for him, and is not this a likely way of reformation?

I conclude therefore now upon the whole matter that Auricular Confeſſion, as it is uſed in the Church of *Rome*, is only an Artifice of greatening the Prieſt, and pleaſing the People; a trick of gratifying the undevout and impious as well as the Devout and Religious; the latter it impoſes upon by its outward appearance of Humility and Piety; to the former it ſerves for a palliative Cure of the Gripes of Conſcience, which they are now and then troubled with; in reality it tends to make ſin eaſie and tolerable by the cheapneſs of its Pardon, and in a word, it is nothing but the Old Diſcipline of the Church in Duſt and Aſhes. And therefore though the Church of *England* in her Liturgy, piouſly wiſhes for the Reſtauration of the Ancient Diſcipline of the Church, it can be no defect in her that ſhe troubles not her ſelf with this Rubbiſh.

FINIS. A

A POST-SCRIPT.

AFter I had finiſhed the foregoing Papers, and moſt part of them had alſo paſt the Preſs, I happened to have notice that there was a Book juſt then come over from *France*, written by a Divine of the *Sorbone*, which with great appearance of Learning maintained the juſt contrary to what I had aſſerted (eſpecially in the Hiſtorical part of this Queſtion) and pretended to prove from the moſt Ancient Monuments of the Holy Scriptures, Fathers, Popes and Councils, that Auricular Confeſſion had been the conſtant Doctrine, and Univerſal and Uninterrupted uſage of the Chriſtian Church for near 1300 years from the Times of our Saviour to the *Laterane* Council.

So ſoon as I heard this, I heartily wiſhed, that either the ſaid Book had come out a little ſooner, or at leaſt that my Papers had been yet in my hands; to the intent that it might have been in my Power, to have corrected what might be amiſs, or ſupplied what was defective in that ſhort Diſcourſe, or indeed if occaſion were, to have wholly ſuppreſt it.

For as ſoon as I entered upon the ſaid Book, and found from no leſs a Man than the Author himſelf, that he had diligently read over all that had been written on both ſides of this controverſy, and that this work of his was the product of Eighteen years ſtudy, and that in the prime of his years, and moſt flouri-

ſhing time of his parts, that it was publiſhed upon the matureſt deliberation on his part, and with the greateſt applauſe and approbation of the Faculty, I thought I had reaſon to ſuſpect, whether a ſmall Tract, written in haſte by a Man of no Name, and full enough of other Buſineſs, could be fit to be ſeen on the ſame Day with ſo elaborate a work.

But by that time I had read a little further, I took Heart, and permitted the Preſs to go on; and now, that I have gone over the whole, I do here profeſs ſincerely, that in all that learned Diſcourſe I ſcarcely found any thing which I had not foreſeen, and as I think in ſome meaſure prevented. But certain I am, nothing occurred that ſtaggered my Judgment, or which did not rather confirm me in what I had written; for though I met with abundance of Citations, and a great deal of Wit, and Dexterity in the management of them, yet I found none of them come home to the point; for whereas they ſometimes recommend and preſs Confeſſion of Sin in general ſometimes to the Church, ſometimes to the Prieſt or Biſhop as well as to God Almighty: Again ſometimes they ſpeak great things of the Dignity of the Prieſt-hood, and the great Honour that Order hath in being wonderfully uſeful to the relief of Guilty or Afflicted Conſciences, other while they treat of the Power of the Keys, and the Authority of the Church, the danger of her Cenſures, the Comfort of her Abſolution, and the ſeverity of her Diſcipline, &c. but all theſe things are acknowledged by us without laborious proof, as well as by our Adverſaries: That which we demand, and expect therefore, is, where ſhall we find in any of the Ancient Fathers, Auricular Confeſſion ſaid to be a Sacrament, or any part of one? Or where is the Univerſal neceſſity of it aſſerted? Or that ſecret ſins committed

mitted after Baptiſm, are by no other means, or upon no other terms pardoned with God, then upon their being confeſſed to men? In theſe things lies the hinge of our diſpute, and of theſe particulars one ought in Reaſon to expect the moſt direct and plain proof imaginable, if the matter was of ſuch Conſequence, of ſuch Univerſal practice and notoriety as they pretend; but nothing of all this appears in this Writer more than in thoſe that have gone before him. In contemplation of which I now adventure this little Tract into the World, with ſomewhat more of Confidence then I ſhould have done, had it not been for this occaſion.

But leſt I ſhould ſeem to be too partial in the Caſe, or to give too ſlight an account of this Learned Man's performance, the Reader who pleaſes ſhall be judge by a Specimen or two which I will here briefly repreſent to him.

The former of them ſhall be the very firſt argument or Teſtimony he produces for his Aſſertion, which I the rather make my choice to give inſtance in, becauſe no Man can be ſaid ingenuouſly to ſeek for faults, to pick and chooſe for matter of exception, that takes the firſt thing that comes to hand.

The buſineſs is this, Chap. 2. Page 11. of his Book he cites the Council of *Illiberis* (with a great deal of circumſtance) as the firſt Witneſs for his Cauſe, and the Teſtimony is taken from the Seventy Sixth Canon, the words are theſe, *Si quis Diaconum*, &c. *i. e.* If any Man ſhall ſuffer himſelf to be ordained Deacon, and ſhall afterwards be convicted to have formerly committed ſome Mortal (or Capital Crime;) if the ſaid Crime come to light by his own voluntary Confeſſion, he ſhall for the ſpace of Three years be debarred the Holy Communion, but in caſe his ſin be diſcover-

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ed and made known to the Church by ſome other hand, then he ſhall ſuffer Five years ſuſpenſion, and after that be admitted only to Lay Communion.

Now who would have ever thought this paſſage fit to be made choice of as the firſt proof of Auricular Confeſſion, or who can imagine it ſhould be any proof at all, much leſs a clear or direct one?

Oh, but here is Confeſſion! It may happen ſo if the party pleaſe, but it is not enjoyned, but voluntary, and that not Auricular neither, but unto the Church, at leaſt for ought appears.

And it is confeſſion of a ſecret Sin too! True it was ſo, till it was either confeſſed or betrayed.

And here is Penance impoſed for a ſecret ſin: True when it was become publick.

And here is a different degree of Penance impoſed upon him that ingenuouſly confeſſes, from him that ſtays till he is accuſed, and hath his ſin proved upon him: And good Reaſon, for the one gave tokens of Repentance, and the other none. But then here is ——What? no Sacrament of Penance, no declared abſolute neceſſity of Confeſſion to Men in order to pardon with God, but only a neceſſity that when the Fact is become notorious, whether by the Confeſſion of the Party, or otherwiſe, that the Church uſe her endeavours to bring the Sinner to Repentance, and free her ſelf from Scandal by making a difference betwixt the Good and the Bad, the more hopeful, and the leſs.

If this be a clear and proper Argument for the neceſſity of Auricular Confeſſion: God help poor *Proteſtants* that cannot diſcern it; but oh the Wit of Man, and the Power of Learning and Logick! What may not ſuch Men prove if they have a mind to it?

The other paſſage I inſtance in, is in his Tenth Chapter, Pag. 156. *viz.* the Critical and Famous Buſineſs of

of the *Nectarian* Reformation at *Conſtantinople*, of which I have ſpoken ſomewhat largely in the foregoing Papers. Now for this: This Learned Gentleman after he hath acknowledged very frankly that publick Confeſſion of ſins was the Ancient uſe of the Church in the times of St. *Irenæus*, *Tertullian*, *Cyprian*, and *Origen*; that is, for the ſpace of about Three hundred years, and that inſtead of that ancient uſage (upon occaſion of the *Decian* Perſecution) a public Penitentiary was appointed at *Conſtantinople*, and moſt other Orthodox Churches, and in ſhort, after he had with more ingenuity then ſome others of his party, owned the undoubted Truth of the Relations of *Socrates* and *Sozomen* touching this Affair, and made ſome Obſervations thereupon not much to the advantage of his cauſe, he at length delivers that which would be very much to his purpoſe, if it could be credible; namely, that upon the whole matter *Nectarius* in aboliſhing the Penitentiary, neither aboliſhed publick nor private Confeſſions, but inſtead of obliging Men to go to the Penitentiary left every Man bound to reſort to his reſpective *Dioceſan*, and confeſs his ſins to him; and ſo Auricular Confeſſion is after this change every whit as neceſſary as it was before; very true (ſay I) it is as neceſſary now as it was before, for it was only voluntary before, and ſo it may be after. But if the intention of *Nectarius*, and the effect of that alteration was only the change of the Perſon, and every Man ſtill obliged to confeſs to ſome body, how comes it to be ſaid in the ſtory that every Man was left to his own Conſcience, doth that word ſignify the Biſhop? then we have found out a right Fanatic *Dioceſan*, for they will all readily confeſs to this Biſhop, and believe his Abſolution as ſufficient as any *Romaniſt* of them all doth: And yet it ſeems to be undeniably

deniably plain that *Socrates* after this Reforma thought of no other Confessor but this, nor imag Men now bound to make any other Confession, this (which if it was not Auricular was very fee for otherwise how comes it to pass that he expo lates the matter with *Eudæmon* who advised change, and bewail'd the danger of this liberty wh was hereby given men, if they were as strictly bo still to confess to their Bishop as they were befor the Penitentiary; therefore the Truth of the Busi seems evidently to be this, that men were now a berty to make their Confessions of secret Sins volu rily, as they were no doubt before the Institution Penitentiary. And now what hath this Learned G tleman gotten by mustering up this story; well h ever the Conclusion must be held, let the Premi look to themselves.

I could find in my Heart (now my hand is in) proceed further and to observe; what pittiful sh he is put to, in his Thirteenth Chapter, to evade Testimonies brought by Monsieur *Daillè* out of *Chrysostom* against his *Hypotheſis*. And the rat because (out of mere tediousness of writing) I in so going Papers omitted to specify the most remar ble discourses which that excellent Author hath u this Subject. But the Authorities are so plain and answerable, and the Evasions of this Gentleman forced and palpable, that I think it needless to about to vindicate the one, or confute the other; in spight of Art this same Thirteenth Chapter (I speak of) will afford no less than Thirteen Argume against the necessity of Auricular Confession.

FINIS.

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